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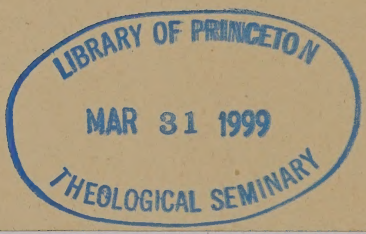
How Came the Bible to the Garo Language?

By M. C. MASON, D. D.



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G. Gillespie

How Came the Bible Into the Garo Language?

By M. C. MASON, D. D.

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FOREWORD

By putting in permanent form this most interesting story of the translation of the Bible into the Garo tongue, Dr. M. C. Mason has rendered a distinct service not only to the future Baptist historian but to the Garo people and the cause of foreign missions. No one else could write it from first-hand knowledge. He himself was the chief of the translators, and to him and his fellow classmate and worker, Dr. E. G. Phillips, the Garos owe it that they can read the Old and New Testaments, not in the Bengali but in the vernacular. It was a stupendous piece of work which these devoted and tireless missionaries from the Empire State undertook and carried through, with the constant assistance and encouragement of their wives. What the reader will not get is a full apprehension of the toil and patience and linguistic ability involved in the task, so modest and self-effacing is the translator in the telling of the great achievement. This crowning work of Doctor Mason, at his advanced age, makes secure an authentic record of the most important event in the life of the Garo people of Assam.

Howard B. Grose,
Editor of Missions.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

HAVING been asked by missionaries at Tura to give a historical account of the translations of Scripture into Garo, and believing that the knowledge of some of the facts connected with such a history would be helpful to workers of succeeding generations, including the Garos themselves, and knowing that no other person living has known nearly as much of this history, I consented to attempt the task. In doing so, it has seemed impossible to avoid giving attention to some of the problems and difficulties which affected and delayed the translations. I might add that rather than trust too much to my own memory for all that occurred decades ago, I have indulged perhaps in more quotations than I otherwise should have done.

I, however, have been most graciously aided in many places by Mrs. Mason, who was continually at my side, as well as by my son, Walter C., whose childhood was largely spent among the Garos, and who later was for about twelve years associated in the Garo work with us.

I hope that what I have gathered may help succeeding workers to understand better some of the more or less puzzling conditions that appear, due to the changes natural to the growth of a language during its first fifty years of development.

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HISTORICAL NOTE ON THE GARO PEOPLE

It should be remembered that the Garos, instead of being an educated people with historical records of their race and a literature, were an extremely ignorant people. After a trip among them under an armed escort, Mr. Keith, our immediate predecessor, wrote, "They had no more conception of what God is, or what a book is like, or what reading and writing mean, than a blind man has of color." But he adds:[1]

> In travels and observations that have extended to all the different classes and nationalities found in America, including the Indian, the Negro, the Spanish Mexican, as well as to many of those in this country, and along the route hither, I can truly say that I have never seen finer-looking specimens of the physical man than I saw in the interior of the Garo Hills.

The Garos are one of the many relics of former Mongolian invasions, and fierce wars with the Aryan nations from the west, and were said to be "the most bloodthirsty and incorrigible of all the tribes met."[2]

Concerning them Sir William Gray, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, said: "They are a bloodthirsty set

[1] Further descriptions may be found in the *Missionary Magazine* of 1875, p. 241. Also in *The Garo Jungle Book*, by Rev. William Carey, published by The American Baptist Publication Society of Philadelphia, p. 130, 131.

[2] *The Garo Jungle Book*, p. 107.

of savages and deserve extermination. The Government is now considering the question." [3] Furthermore, in our intercourse among them we found them broken up into unfriendly clans among themselves, located in a land "of jungle-covered crags and deadly climate, standing out obstinate and defiant, a secret lair and inaccessible fortress of ruthless and deadly foes."

[3] *The Garo Jungle Book*, p. 2.

CHAPTER I

PROVIDENTIAL BEGINNINGS

The First Converts, 1863

As described in *The Garo Jungle Book,* a few Garo lads had been persuaded to attend a school taught in the Bengali language at Goalpara. Of these lads, Omed and Ramkhe having become able to converse in the Assamese language came in touch with Christianity at Gauhati and were converted in 1863, and a little later Rangkhu found Christ in a Mission school taught by Doctor and Mrs. Stoddard in Nowgong. These soon after returned to their own people to tell them of the eternal life which they had found.

First Garo Church, 1867

Their story was at first not welcomed, but, after persistent efforts, against strong and dangerous opposition, some converts were gathered and eight of these sent a request to Doctor Bronson, then of Nowgong two hundred miles away, to visit them. Accepting this invitation, he came to them in April, 1867, and after examination baptized converts and organized there the first Garo church of forty members. Under wonderful providential guidance, further mission work was planned for these Garos, and on October 3, 1867, Rev. and Mrs. I. J. Stoddard, former workers at Nowgong, took possession of the place in Goalpara " on the top of the beautiful hill overlooking the Brahmaputra River " which Doctor Bronson upon his

first visit had selected and purchased with funds contributed by officials and other European residents of that place.

A Beginning Through the Assamese Language

Doctors Bronson and Stoddard and some other missionaries of Assam made a few visits to this church, during which discussions were had regarding Garo words for Scripture terms. For example, what word could be used for God? No satisfactory term being found in Garo, it was decided to borrow for them the Assamese word *Iswar*. But the Mongolian difficulties in rightly pronouncing this compelled a change from *Iswar* to *Isol,* which is still in common use. How often have I struggled to get an R pronounced when only an L was produced! However, whatever mission work was done by these missionaries, was done through the Assamese language, aided by interpretations made by these partially educated Christian Garos. Even Doctor Stoddard, who later spent full five years at Goalpara, did his work only by means of the Assamese language.

First Translations, 1872

At this juncture, January 15, 1872, Rev. T. J. Keith being especially designated for Garo work, and stationed at Goalpara, began his work by first learning to use the Bengali language, a sister language to the Assamese, and the language of the Government schools, for there he was able to secure well-qualified instructors, and to use the few partially educated Garos as interpreters into the Garo. Soon after that he began to put the Scriptures into the Garo language, so that under date of October 1, 1874,

having been less than three years in the country, he wrote concerning Scripture translations as follows: [1]

> The Gospel of Matthew has been undertaken and, with the efficient assistance of two or three of the native brethren, has been carried forward to the twentieth chapter. The printing is being done at the Baptist Mission Press in Calcutta, at the expense of the English Baptist Bible Translation Society, obtained through Dr. G. H. Rouse.

Later Mr. Keith writes, " Some months thereafter that Gospel was issued from the press; and while no doubt very imperfect, yet proved so useful as to justify proceeding with the other Gospels." [2]

New Recruits

At this point, December 19, 1874, Revs. E. G. Phillips and M. C. Mason with their wives arrived for work among the Garos. While these began learning the Garo language, Mr. Keith continued his efforts at translation through the Bengali.

In doing this, as I remember, Mr. Keith asked some of these partially educated Garos, such as Ramkhe, Rangkhu, and Gongaram, each to take a Gospel and, with what knowledge he had of the Assamese and the Bengali, to translate from those into his own language. Afterward their work was revised and corrected by Mr. Keith. And within a few months Mr. Keith, with whom I was sharing new and rich experiences, while making a tour of some Garo villages wrote, under date of January 13, 1876, saying: [3]

[1] *Third Biennial Report of Garo Work,* p. 9; also *Missionary Magazine,* July, 1875, p. 243.
[2] *Missionary Magazine,* July, 1876, p. 249.
[3] *Missionary Magazine,* July, 1876, p. 249.

One year ago I was in Calcutta completing the printing of the Gospels in Garo. Now I am in the midst of the Garo country, reading and expounding the Word of God to the people in their own tongue. It is a great privilege, and makes the work more interesting than ever before. . . The reading of the story of the Cross, in the congregations of the people, possessed an interest to them never before witnessed, from the simple fact that hitherto it has always been read in a foreign tongue.

This was practically Mr. Keith's first practise in using the Garo language in his preaching. It was also my first tour among the villages and my first effort at Garo preaching. We were blessed with rich experiences, and rejoiced greatly at the evidences of God's work among some of those we met.[4] However, after one further trip in company with Mr. Phillips, Mr. Keith's health failing, in November, with his family, he went to Calcutta. The medical decision was imperative that he must not spend another hot season there. He himself returned to Goalpara, made tours among the churches and thus introduced the new missionaries to their work. Early in 1876, he was obliged to leave the work in inexperienced and ill-prepared hands.[5] Upon leaving he added,[6] " It is a matter of extreme gratitude to me that I have been enabled to accomplish this work before leaving the field, and have been able to use the translation in my recent touring."

Thus was completed the first translation of the Gospels into Garo. A work with which, in its results and in its helpfulness in civilizing and educating the Garo tribe to be a power for good in the land, no single step can seemingly be well compared. Notwithstanding its im-

[4] *Missionary Magazine,* July, 1876, p. 115.
[5] *Jubilee Volume,* p. 62.
[6] *Missionary Magazine,* July, 1876, p. 249.

perfections, referred to by Mr. Keith himself, in general the thoughts and teachings of these Gospels were well conveyed, and it is a translation in my opinion worthy of commendation.

First Publication

Regarding the publication of these first translations of the Gospels the following facts are of interest: I find nothing to show when, where, or how many copies were printed. The type of Mark, however, would seem to show that it was printed by The American Baptist Mission Press at Sibsagar, "where some of the earlier publications were printed." But in the case of Luke and John, I find that 750 copies were printed "at the Baptist Mission Press in Calcutta, at the expense of the English Baptist Translation Society as before mentioned."[7] This Society holds to the translation of every idea into words understandable by those for whom the translation is made. Other Bible Societies objected to the translation of the word *baptizo,* wishing this to be simply transliterated. This to a Garo would have no meaning, and only as he might meet a person of some pedo-baptist denomination of some other part of India, would be told that the word meant sprinkling or putting wet fingers to the brow.

Baptize

Since the word baptize is here mentioned, I may remark that the word used in these first translations was *aua. Aua* means bathe, which at first seemed a tolerable

[7] *Missionary Magazine,* July, 1875, p. 243; also *Biennial Report of Garo Work,* p. 9.

translation. But in most parts of the Garo Hills people bathe by standing under a water-spout, or in a shallow stream, while washing the body. We also learned that this word was used for a ceremonial cleansing practised by the Hindu idolaters near some of their borders, sometimes by simply sprinkling the water over their idols or other objects.

Furthermore, *bathing,* instead of giving the real meaning, in some passages of Scripture obscures the thought, or even teaches error. See for example Romans 6: 3, 4, "bathed into his death," or Colossians 2: 12, "buried with him in bathing, wherein also ye are risen with him." Again in Matthew 20: 22, 23, as found in some manuscripts and as given in the Authorized version of 1611, "Are ye able to be bathed with the bath that I am bathed with," could by no means be understood to be overwhelmed or immersed in sufferings. Therefore, before publishing further translations and holding to the one meaning of the Greek as used for "about two thousand years," [8] we had substituted in common practise for the word *aua* the word *napbola,* which as later explained to a Bible Society means to dip the person into water. The word is used regarding persons only, and rarely except in connection with the ordinance or rite of religious baptism, a word brought into general use by seeing the rite performed, and so used in Garo since about 1879.

[8] See Dr. Nathan Brown's scholarly discussion of this when translating the word into Japanese, found in *Missionary Magazine,* August, 1875, p. 298.

CHAPTER II

NEW WORKERS AND THEIR PROBLEMS

Mr. Keith upon leaving the country, in writing to the Society of the two new missionaries and the outlook of the work, says: "With such facilities as were available they began the study of the Garo language. Their progress has been such that they will be able to carry forward the old work without any serious detriment to it after my departure." [1]

Prerequisites

But before proceeding with further translations of Scripture, there was for these new missionaries, besides the necessity of acquiring a greater familiarity with the language, the imperative necessity of a better knowledge of the geographic and climatic limitations under which they must work, and of the habits and social relations of the people. They needed also to study the conditions of the work and the methods so far employed.

Problems

Such studies brought to their attention not simply novel conditions, but many problems, some of which were more or less puzzling and too closely related to all future work to be overlooked in this connection. The churches situated among a people so utterly ignorant, universally given to the use of intoxicants, highly honoring polygamy, and

[1] *Missionary Magazine*, 1876, p. 248.

given to training their children with threats and lies, needed enlightenment and upbuilding of character, as well as leadership in efforts for the salvation of others.

First Problem

Such conditions required the use of every available agency and one of the first problems was what language should be employed in the great work of public education. We, the new missionaries, had studied only Garo. Mr. Keith had so far used the Bengali, and seemingly at first accepted the position of

> those who reasoning probably on the principle of the survival of the fittest, prophesied that in time the Bengali must entirely supersede the Garo vernacular, hence argued that it would be best to give all instruction in that language. Yet [said he] we feel that it lies at such a distant point that in the work of educating and Christianizing the people much valuable time may be saved by preparing books, tedious as that method is, in their own vernacular.

And he wrote that, "Three Primary Reading Books, the manuscript of which was prepared under the supervision of Mr. Stoddard, had been printed." [2]

However, the sudden and unexpected departure of Mr. Keith allowed no discussion of this subject, and as I do not remember having seen such books, I doubt if these were really put through the press. Perhaps after Mr. Keith had seen the keen interest aroused by the reading of the gospel in their own tongue, he may have doubted the wisdom of continuing educational work for such a people in an altogether foreign language. At any rate the new missionaries had not visited the schools very long and noted their work without becoming convinced that a better

[2] *Third Biennial Report of Garo Work*, p. 8.

medium of instruction was an absolute necessity. All schools had books in the Bengali language alone, and the Garo children had first to learn an alphabet of fifty-one letters with many variations, and an almost unlimited number of combinations, including the use of sounds quite foreign to their own tongue. Both parents and children were loth to give time to learn what appeared to them to be so useless, especially as it took years to master the simple beginning of books. Most teachers as well as pupils knew the meaning of practically nothing they read. Seemingly, some solution of this problem should be attempted without delay. We, therefore, prepared and printed a few primers in harmony with the printed Gospels, still using the Bengali character. Hence, the interest in books with some understandable meaning was soon so quickened as to master this problem rapidly.

A Second Problem

In 1868, Doctor Bronson had printed a small booklet in the Roman character, saying: "The Garos have no written character, therefore the Roman character has been given them. Bengali letters do not express satisfactorily all their sounds." Yet these four Gospels had been printed in the Bengali character, because, as Mr. Keith argued, the Garos have no written language, and those who have thus far received instruction have received it mainly through the Bengali. Hence, what character should be used for further printing of Garo books was a second problem which needed further study of conditions requiring time and cautious procedure. Our task was to guide and train native fellow workers and through them to bring salvation to the Garos. Such guidance required

the retention and strengthening of confidence in the wisdom of their missionary leaders. Autocratic or seemingly unreasonable dictation would not accomplish this, especially as every teacher or fellow worker, who had through much tedious toil and persistent efforts acquired what knowledge he had attained, would fail to perceive the wisdom of casting away his attainments and beginning anew at another similar undertaking. Hence, the solution of this problem was postponed for further study and experiment.

A Third Problem

Another of these early problems was the selection of a more central and more convenient base of operations. Work from Goalpara on the Brahmaputra River, ten miles from the nearest Garo village, seemed, at that time, as I have often said, like trying to melt a huge block of ice by holding a candle high above it. A base from which the whole field could be more easily reached—those south as well as those north of the high mountain range extending eastward the length of the field—seemed not only desirable but almost imperative. Tura at the western end of the range where the British officials were holding a position, had been more or less talked of, and had been visited by each of the preceding missionaries. Another consideration in favor of Tura was the obvious advantage to both Government and the Mission of being near these officials in their new Governmental undertakings. While all in a way approved of this as a center, no one seemed able to occupy it, nor were there funds for clearing the jungle and constructing buildings. Even before Mr. Keith had left, we two missionaries had visited Tura and consulted with

officials there. Of the action then taken, Mr. Phillips writes:[3] "In 1876, it was decided that one family go there and the other remain in Goalpara for the present. Mr. Phillips having gone ahead and prepared a small temporary house, removed there with Mrs. Phillips in March, 1877."

Government soon proposed to pass over to the Mission the control of the educational work of the whole district with the whole Grant-in-Aid for schools, provided, among other conditions, that the Mission bring the Normal School from Goalpara to Tura. So important did this proposition appear to us that it seemed wise for me to visit Tura, which I did, and spent there six days with brother Phillips, reviewing, discussing, and planning our work. As a result of that conference, it was decided to accept the Government proposition and accordingly early in February, 1878, the school was taken to Tura.[3]

[3] *Jubilee Volume*, p. 62.

CHAPTER III

FURTHER MOVES AND NEW TRANSLATIONS

Translation of Genesis, 1878

The Gospels so strongly depend upon an assumed knowledge of the book of Genesis, that Mr. Phillips planned for the school a course of instruction in Genesis concerning which, under date of July 1, 1878, he writes: [1]

> We have as yet no translation for our use, but Ramkhe under brother Mason's supervision is hastily making one. I have the first two chapters and find them very satisfactory considering the time spent on them. Such a translation will certainly be a great help to us now, and will be a good beginning toward a more careful translation hereafter.

During that rainy season in my work on the north side, still having Ramkhe with me, I continued working on this translation of Genesis.

Change of Base Completed

However, the season brought much illness to those in Tura, and soon after as Mr. Phillips writes, "The missionaries had now become convinced that if there were but two of them, the best interests of the Mission would be served by their being located together at Tura." "Consequently in November, 1878, we gave up Goalpara as a Mission Station and removed to Tura." [2]

While this was a disappointing move to the Christians,

[1] *Missionary Magazine*, October, 1878, p. 376.
[2] *Jubilee Volume*, p. 63.

thus far located only along the northern border, and a sad separation for several months of the year to me who had no greater enjoyment than that of visiting them in their homes, hearing their experiences, giving consolation and encouragement,[3] it more than doubled our ability. For only by thus being together could we two young missionaries take full advantage of the qualifications that so fitted us to be congenial team-mates. Born and brought up on thrifty, well-stocked farms in western New York, classmates, roommates, and chums during our educational careers, and finally marrying sisters, we were far better prepared to be yokefellows in service than are most missionaries. And in the light of the field to which we were sent it certainly appears providential that we were thus brought together and for forty years permitted to pull together shoulder to shoulder, of one heart and aim.

Further Scripture Publications

In making this change of base, the multiplicity of labors precluded attention to translation work, except occasionally as opportunity afforded or necessity demanded. Nevertheless, during the following three years, mainly during the rainy seasons, I had completed the book of Genesis, adding explanatory notes. Mr. Phillips had revised the Gospels of Matthew and Mark and translated Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians, so that when returning to America for health, I was able while in Calcutta early in 1882 to superintend the printing of these six books at the Baptist Mission Press there.

As Mr. Phillips says:[4]

[3] For further conditions and methods, see *Missionary Magazine*, July, 1878, p. 245-247.

[4] *Jubilee Volume*, p. 76.

The plan of work in translating the Gospels and the first half of Genesis was to let the native helpers make the first translation from the Bengali or Assamese, and then carefully revise their work. The plan in the further translations and revisions was for the missionary to do the work from the first, aided constantly by the best native helpers available.

CHAPTER IV

LANGUAGE LIMITATIONS

Vocabulary

It is perhaps needless to remark that among a people so ignorant and with a vocabulary so limited and so isolated there would be hundreds or even thousands of objects and ideas without names, and that such a language must grow by borrowing from languages through which their knowledge comes. From the Bengali, pupils found *kitap* for "book," *leka* for "paper"; later from the English came "school," "slate," "pencil," etc.

Idioms

But there were other limitations of language, for example, the Garo had no word for "brother" or "sister." They required specific rather than general terms. A brother or sister must be one older or younger. To speak of either without showing whether the brother or sister was older or younger was out of the question. In Matthew 10:21, and Mark 13:12 where it is said, "The brother shall deliver up the brother to death," the first printed book had in Matthew, "The elder brother shall deliver up the younger," while in Mark it was the reverse, "The younger shall deliver up the elder," due probably to the conception of the partially educated lad making the first draft.

While difficulties of this nature may be easily recognized, the amount of labor, care, and research required of

translators may not be so readily appreciated; at least unless it is remembered that they were loaded with many other lines of work, and were far from library helps. In the above-mentioned passages a new term was coined by leaving off the plural of the word for "brothers," which included both older and younger, and is understandable, if not pleasing, to the critically minded Garo.

While mentioning the limitations of the Garo language it would be hardly fair to overlook the fact that it has some advantages even over the English. The Garo has different words in the second personal pronoun to distinguish when one or more than one is addressed. Likewise, in the first person plural there are two words, one when excluding, the other when including persons addressed. At first we found ourselves using the latter pronoun instead of the former, when for example, we prayed, "Our Father, forgive *us our* sins."

Proper Names

It would seemingly be a neglect to overlook here some of the difficulties involved in the spelling of names in a new language. Note *first* that in English there are about two-thirds as many letters as there are in Greek. Therefore, for some of these extra eleven letters there would naturally be a question as to what English letters can most nearly represent them. For this reason there are differences in English of not a few names, as is seen by comparing the names given in the Authorized version of 1611 with that of the American Standard version of 1881, or with other English versions. For example, see Luke 3:29-35 in these different versions. Note *again* that the first Garo translations were made not from Greek or

from English translations, but by uneducated Garos only able to read such Scriptures as had been previously translated into the Bengali or Assamese. Consequently, names were again restricted by the limitations of that alphabet, the letters of which, although numerous, lacked many of the sounds found in either Greek or English, and of course sounds for which there was no Bengali character could not be represented. For example, that had no diphthongs, as th, ph, sh, etc. Neither were there any of the final silent h's as found in English; there was no "z," no "v," no "ch," so "s" had to stand for "z" as in Sera and Boas, and "u" for "v" as in Daud.

Then *thirdly,* in making later translations there was in a sense a limitation due to the necessity of respecting the use through many years of names which could not well be so arbitrarily changed as to be wholly unrecognized. Without trying to notice each of the approximately 2,800 names, let us note a few: The Gospel of Matthew was the first Gospel put into the Garo language. With no "th," no "ew," the translators were reduced to Mati for Matthew. Notwithstanding the unpleasant, almost shocking sound to the English ear, a deference to long use by all rather forbade a change, especially as there was no "th" sound in Garo. Furthermore, close attention had to be given to uniformity. The first Gospels printed had, for example, six different spellings for the name Abraham. An error doubtless due, first, largely to the diversity of the first draftsmen, and, secondly, to their work being followed by a very hasty revision. The "c" of Jacob and Isaac in Garo is always "k," and this at least is no more remarkable than the original substitution of "c" in English for "k" in Greek, and "j" in Jacob instead of "i" as in

Isaac. It will also be noticed that James is always Jacob in Greek and in Garo. Again, since the later generations are learning English more or less, the use of English Scripture names increasingly appears, and after Romanizing there is a tendency in later work to follow more closely the English, so that *Ishak* becomes Isaac, and the names containing diphthongs are more used as in Korinth, Ephesus, Philippians, Thessalonians, and Timothy.

Considering the slow growth of this translation under the many changes of conditions for translating and printing, it can scarcely be expected that discrepancies would be wholly avoided.

CHAPTER V

LATER MODIFICATIONS

Early Translations

In December, 1886, at the Assam Mission Jubilee, Mr. Phillips says: "Among a tribe of savages step by step with the entrance of Christianity there must be done a large amount of literary work. The Bible must be translated and a Christian literature must be given to them, else the laborers will find themselves laboring on without tools." And he reports at that date the completion of the revision of Matthew and Mark, the translation of Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians by himself, and a translation of Genesis with explanatory notes by Mr. Mason, which as before mentioned, were printed in 1882. Although other portions were nearly ready for the press, illness, furloughs, and deaths delayed the printing.

Further Translations

During the years from 1882 to 1886, each of us had for a time been on furlough. And many changes had occurred, which with a multiplicity of most pressing tasks caused further delay in Scripture translation and printing. Nevertheless, Mr. Phillips had finished the revision of the Gospel of John, I had revised the Gospel of Luke, and had translated the three Epistles of John, the Epistle of Jude, and three chapters of Revelation, and 3,500 copies of these were printed under the supervision of Mr. Phillips in 1888. At the same time, Mr. Phillips had prepared and printed much other literature. During the

summer of 1889 with the help of Thangkan and Bakal, I had translated the book of Acts, which was again revised and 3,500 copies were printed in 1890. In 1891, I translated the Epistle of James and the greater part of First Peter. Mr. Phillips had translated seven chapters of Romans. All of these as well as Sunday-school lessons on the Gospel of Matthew prepared by me, a hymn-book, and the monthly periodical were printed on our hand-press at Tura. In 1892, again I revised the book of Genesis with notes. Mr. Phillips in America had again revised the books of Matthew and Mark and sent them for printing in Calcutta under the supervision of Miss Bond and myself. These with the other books put out amounted in all to 14,500 copies. In one of my reports of that time, I find the following:[1] "We feel grateful that we have been able to put so much through the press this year, nevertheless, we come far short of supplying the demand for Garo Scriptures; over 375 rupees worth of Scriptures were sold during the past year."

Completion of the New Testament, 1895

November 11, 1893, Mr. Phillips returned, and in December Mrs. Mason and I and Miss Bond went on furlough, concerning which Mr. Phillips remarks:[2] "All had served long terms and had well earned needed rest," and continues, "During the heat of 1894, Mrs. Phillips was prostrated by severe fever, and she and Mr. Phillips spent most of the following rains in Darjeeling, to her advantage physically and to his in the matter of translation work."

[1] *The Third Triennial Conference Report*, p. 27.
[2] *The Fourth Triennial Conference Report*, p. 34.

So that at the end of 1895, nineteen years after the first Gospels were printed, Mr. Phillips reports:[3]

> In Scripture translation we rejoice in the completion of the New Testament. Mr. Mason finished the translation and publication of Titus on to the end of Revelation before leaving India. While in Darjeeling with Mrs. Phillips in 1894, I finished the translation of Romans on to the end of 2 Timothy, and then went to Calcutta and saw it through the press, thus completing the New Testament. A large number of well-bound copies were at once demanded and purchased by the people.

Other Religious Literature

The New Testament having been completed, and some of the historical background of the chosen people as given in the Pentateuch having been translated, we now felt at liberty to give more time and attention to such other religious books as would help build up church life and Christian character. Among these were Doctor Broadus' *Catechism of Scripture Teaching,* and an *Outline Study of the Life of Christ,* by Stevens and Burton, translated and printed by Mr. Phillips. I had prepared a chart showing the chronological order of events of the life of Christ, giving also the Scripture references in the form of a harmony, and noting the locality, consecutive order of the miracles, parables, conversations, and addresses of Christ. I had also continued my notes and comments on the Gospel of Matthew up to three hundred pages.

The closing years of the nineteenth century brought taxing experiences, among which were heartrending deaths in two of the families, also severe illnesses requiring retirements of some and furloughs of others. So that

[3] *The Fourth Triennial Conference Report,* p. 38.

at the close of 1900, of those there in 1899, Mrs. Mason and I alone remained on the field.[4]

The report regarding literature that year begins: "Notwithstanding the multiplicity of work and heavy taxes upon our strength, the literary work has not been entirely neglected.[5] And following that, I find mentioned thirty thousand copies embracing five different volumes as having been printed. Among these were many copies of Romanized books. I also note that in the year 1892, the report reads:[6] "This last year, we revised our three school primers. We have printed seven thousand copies of the first;" of this "two thousand copies were Romanized and printed as a feeler and educator toward substituting this character in all our Garo literature."

[4] *The Sixth Triennial Conference Report*, p. 29.
[5] *The Sixth Triennial Conference Report*, p. 32.
[6] *The Third Triennial Conference Report*, p. 27.

CHAPTER VI

A GREAT FORWARD STEP

This brings again to our attention the problem before mentioned and delayed for further study, viz., What character should be used for printing all Garo books?

Reasons for Romanizing

The missionaries themselves, always regretting the necessity of using the Bengali character, were continually looking forward for something less intricate, and in their investigations they had found, *first,* that twenty-one Roman letters used in the English language were sufficient to represent every needed sound in the Garo language. One of these was the period type turned upside down to represent a sharp staccato sound at the end of a syllable. And each letter had its own one distinct sound, save that some vowels as in English had a long sound in open syllables, as "o" in "go," and a short sound in a closed syllable, as "o" in "for"; the long sound of "e" being that of "e" in "they" and the long sound of "i" being that of "i" in "machine." Furthermore, while in the case of "n" when followed by "g" each letter may sometimes have its separate sound, they mostly have the combined sound as in English in the word "singing," which so accords with English use, that we found this use of it of no practical inconvenience.

Again, by testing these letters in teaching small children to read, we found that in a few weeks these children could

read with ease, and explain the meaning, while sometimes years had been spent in learning Bengali without reaching much.

And *again,* a greater saving of time was made by the use of typewriting machines, instead of preparing all manuscripts by handwork as before, since we found no suitable typewriting machines for Bengali characters, even though we tried the making of one.

Again, with this character, printing, instead of being limited to presses of Bengal, can be done in any part of the world, as was afterward done by Mr. Phillips in California.[1]

Furthermore, by using the Roman the danger of absorbing much evil would be avoided. While printing Scripture in 1882, Rev. J. Robinson, born and brought up in Calcutta and Interpreter of Bengali in the Government High Court of Calcutta, said to me: "Why do you use the Bengali character for Garo books? I would not allow the Garos to know even the Bengali alphabet, lest they be thus led into much evil." I have since met native Christian parents of India who because of this danger never allowed their own children to learn the mother tongue of their parents. Again using this alphabet as in English created a great incentive to learn English, without which no one in India is regarded as educated.

Romanizing Adopted, 1902

After twenty-eight years of struggling with such an alphabet as the Bengali, and after thus testing with such satisfactory results the practicability of the Roman character and observing through the increasing subscription

[1] *The Report of the Sixth Session of the Conference,* p. 32.

list of the monthly periodical the decreasing prejudice of the older generation and the increased interest of the younger people, is it strange that we should have urged a complete change of character and that after having personally discussed the subject with the Chief Commissioner of the Province at the close of 1902, we were happy in being able to say as Mr. Phillips then reports,[2] " We have decided to change the dress of our Garo literature from the Bengali to the Roman character, and the Government approving has given us Rs. 1,000 to help defray the cost of publishing text-books in this character "?

A table for the year 1909 shows the production of twelve different books, amounting to 47,900 volumes of 8,206,450 pages at a cost of Rs. 4,368/8.[3] This change against natural opposition and other difficulties seems to us to have been wise and helpful, and is now approved by Garos in general, as well as by missionaries coming since to the field.

[2] *The Seventh Session Report for 1902,* p. 48, 49
[3] *The Tenth Biennial Report for 1909,* p. 88-93.

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST GREAT OBSTACLE

Prohibitive Costs

At this stage of our progress, another problem began to press for solution. In America where ordinary workmen could earn several dollars per day, they could purchase a well-bound copy of the New Testament for a dime, while notwithstanding our much improved economy in printing with the Roman character, a Garo had to pay the value of three full days' labor to secure a printed New Testament. There was an abundance of money uselessly wasted in Christian lands. But those lands were far away and churches there were weary of appeals for help. What an obstacle!

Appeals for Help

Appeals were made, however, to the home Society who, under date of May, 1909, referred the request "to the Foreign Secretary for correspondence with the British and Foreign Bible Society as to the possibility of securing aid from that organization, and requested the Garo missionaries to submit their request to the Assam Reference Committee for advisory judgment." A reply from the Secretary of our American Baptist Foreign Mission Society dated May, 1911, said: "After a conference with Doctor Taylor of the Bible House, I have strong hopes that we may secure some aid toward the expense which you have had at Tura. It cannot come, it seems, from the

Society as such, but it may perhaps be had from some individual." While such words gave hope, they were not to be depended upon. And even before this arrived, because of its delay, I had asked the Calcutta District Secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society if it were possible to obtain help from them, "to be wholly used to reduce the price of ten thousand copies of the New Testament already printed." His kindly reply was: "I shall have much pleasure in laying your inquiry before the Committee. Thereafter the matter will go to the Home Committee in London."

As requested, the matter was referred to the Assam Reference Committee, who appointed a committee of eight, one representing each language used in the mission, "to confer with the Rev. A. W. Young, Secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society, Calcutta Auxiliary, now present with us, as to possible terms of cooperation." [1]

This committee's report was unanimously adopted by the conference. It consisted of approval of cooperation on three conditions: First, A translation of the Greek word *baptizo* and its cognates. Second, In new translations a transliteration of the word in the text with a translation in the margin, or in parentheses in the text immediately following the transliterated word, as is now done for Rev. W. Pettigrew in the Naga. Third, When the Society would, as they did in cases, first print with the word transliterated in the text, then it should hand over the type forms to us and permit us to print our own version after inserting our own translation of the word *baptizo,* but disapprove of our missionaries accepting aid for publishing Scripture with the word for baptism simply transliterated. It also

[1] *The Tenth Biennial Session Report of 1910,* p. 12.

disapproved of missionaries placing their names as translators on any version in which only transliterations are used, and third, it also disapproved of our missionaries accepting aid for printing Scriptures with the word for baptism transliterated.[2]

After several inquiries and explanations, a reply came from the British and Foreign Society in London saying, " Such help would be forthcoming if the Garo New Testament complies with the Society's requirements respecting the translation of baptize and its cognates." These requirements were given as follows: "(1) The term translated baptize in English and its cognates should be translated in the text, provided all Missions using or likely to use the version are agreed upon the rendering, or (2) transliterated, without any translation in either text or note, or (3) transliterated with two alternative renderings in the margin to express both interpretations." While sympathetic and kind it further said, " The London Committee can do nothing in the way of publication or grant-in-aid unless the position of the Bible Society is completely safeguarded."

Bible Translation Society to the Rescue

The New Testament having been printed and the Garos having had the Gospels in their language for about thirty-five years, there was at that date no chance for any change, even had it seemed wise to consider it. Therefore, upon explaining our need to Mr. Herbert Anderson, Secretary Baptist Mission Society, Calcutta, he forwarded the applications to The Bible Translation Society of London giving us encouragement to hope for aid. A reply from

[2] *Ibid,* p. 18.

the Secretary in London said: "I shall have great pleasure in submitting your appeal at our next Committee meeting. The stand your mission took with regard to the cooperation of the British and Foreign Bible Society, I feel to be the only one which a conscientious translator could take."

Under date of May 26, 1911, word came saying:

> At our Committee meeting sanction was given for the assuming of the responsibility for your New Testament in the Roman character; at the present moment the Committee does not see its way to touching the Bengali character New Testament at all. . . Meanwhile may I express my great pleasure that we have been in the goodness of God permitted to have a hand in this work, and desire that you and your brethren may be greatly blessed in your work for the Garo-speaking people. . . We take over all the sheets at Calcutta at the prices mentioned by you in your letter of March 23.

This covered the completion of the cost of printing ten thousand copies of the whole New Testament. Such help and such sympathy was received with joy and thankfulness that God had led the way and that New Testaments in Garo could be had for annas four, annas nine, or annas twelve per copy according to the binding given.[3]

Three Aims Reached

Thus at the end of 1911, thirty-five years after the mission had come into the hands of the two missionaries who used the Garo language, we find that all Garo schools are now taught in the Garo language instead of the Bengali, and all Garo literature is being published in the Roman character instead of the cumbersome and taxing Bengali

[3] An anna at that time was about two cents, and four annas was the price of an ordinary day's labor. Sixteen annas make one rupee.

alphabet; also that the Garo New Testament is completely translated and Romanized and is being furnished to the people at reasonable prices; and furthermore, instead of inserting a foreign word which in Assam, at least, was largely used for an ordinance, which instead of expressing the important need of a public expression of one's confidence in the death and resurrection of Christ for our salvation, encouraged the error so appetizing to the unregenerated, and so extensively accepted among pedobaptists as an ordinance essential for salvation and eternal life, administered without the permission or knowledge of the recipient.

CHAPTER VIII

WORK ON THE OLD TESTAMENT

For the following three years, during which the larger part of the missionary staff had been at different times on furlough, the weight of responsibility for literary work had rested largely upon Dr. E. G. Phillips and Miss Bond, aided by such of the Garos as had obtained advanced education. Other duties than translation of Scripture, however, seemed to demand first attention. So that, regarding the literary work, Doctor Phillips writes,[1] "It is a matter of deep regret that during the three years since our last report more has not been accomplished to meet the urgent needs in this department." Much other work "hindered my giving the effort to this that I had hoped to do when I returned from furlough at the close of 1909." He, however, adds, that besides publishing the monthly periodical and the preparation of a Garo grammar for the schools,

> In the remnant of time available for work on the Old Testament I have translated Leviticus and Numbers and made a beginning on Deuteronomy. Doctor Mason has found time to complete his series of Sunday-school lessons on Acts, which are now being published in a book of two hundred and fifty pages, a valuable commentary in Garo on the whole book. Rev. Thangkan Sangma has translated into Garo nearly all of Exodus, and Doctor Mason has with him revised part of the manuscript.

And he further mentions several text-books undertaken by some of the missionaries and native assistants.

[1] *The Report of the Twelfth Biennial Session of the Assam Baptist Missionary Conference*, p. 41.

Workers Failing

In 1914, the health of Doctor Phillips continued to fail until in July, deathly ill, he with Mrs. Phillips, escorted by Doctor Crozier,[2] left Tura, never again to return. After forty years of close cooperation on the field both Doctor Phillips and Doctor Mason were absent for a few months. In 1915 Doctor and Mrs. Mason returning found Mr. Dring and Mr. Walter Mason ill, so that ere long they had to return to America and there remain. The Station Report at that time, referring to the Society's Annual Report, says:[3]

> Ten missionaries at Tura during 1916. But two were never there, five others have been absent a total of two years and four months out of the year. Two of the five are now invalided home, two others reenlisting have just arrived bringing fresh cheer and courage.

From that conference in Sibsagar at the farther end of the province, due to accidents of Indian travel, after attending the Garo association, Mrs. Mason and I were delayed in our return to Tura.

Work Reorganized

In the meantime, Mr. Harding, who had just returned, with the younger missionaries, reorganized the work, and asked me to give my further time to the translation of Scripture and to other literary work, to which requests I yielded, and in compliance began such work, using such helpers as were available.

[2] *The Report of the Thirteenth Session of the Assam Missionary Conference,* p. 49.
[3] *Report Given at the Fifteenth Session of the Assam Conference,* p. 31.

Renewal of Old Testament Work

Before taking furlough Miss Bond had left with Modhunath Momin some outline of work for school readers. A number of such books was accordingly prepared and put through the press, printed by and at the expense of the Christian Literature Society in Madras. We, however, gave chief attention to further translation, revision, and printing of the Old Testament Scriptures, which were readily printed and bound for the market by the British and Foreign Bible Society in Calcutta, the only limitation at that time being that imposed by the Society that no comments or notes should be added. And in all of our work on the Old Testament Scriptures this Society and their Secretary, the Rev. A. Willifer Young, have most heartily and sympathetically cooperated and pushed the publications, often having two or more presses at the work at the same time.

Genesis Revised

With help from Garo brethren, among whom were Modhunath Momin, Thangkan Sangma, and Rangam Momin, the book of Genesis was again for the fourth time revised, Romanized, provided with references, and printed. The books of Exodus and Leviticus were also revised and printed in 1917. In December of that year, Miss Bond returned from furlough. And from that time, when not called away to other fields, as was the case at the time of the tragedy at Sadiya in 1920,[4] where she was detained for more than a year, we three, Miss Bond, Modhunath Momin, and I, worked daily, using such other

[4] *Report of Eighteenth Session of Assam Conference*, p. 14.

helpers as could be obtained from time to time. Modhunath had been for a time in Cook Academy at Montour Falls, N. Y., was able to handle English well, and was at that time the best Bengali scholar among the Garos, and being brought up near Assamese-speaking people, could easily understand the Assamese. Miss Bond was well educated, but had no knowledge of the Hebrew or Chaldean languages. As general guides all of the English versions available and the Bengali and Assamese translations were used, and when there seemed to be discrepancies or uncertainties, I was able to ascertain the meaning and grammatical constructions of any Hebrew word, Miss Bond being responsible for all of the references. Thus we plodded on while bearing our share of the religious services at the station, Miss Bond aiding much with the other work of the lady missionaries, and I, besides teaching a weekly Bible class, editing and publishing the Garo periodical up to its forty-fourth year, ending with April, 1924.[5]

It is generally thought, I suppose, that a book for the press may be left to their proof-readers to see that errors are eliminated. But when neither type-setter nor proof-reader knows a word of the language of the book, and when the editor is far away, proof-reading is tedious and printing exceedingly slow.

In printing a Bengali-Garo dictionary for Garos, a demi-octavo volume of 884 pages, it required seven years to read proof. It was our custom to select such helpers as

[5] During these forty-four years Doctor Phillips and I had alternately edited and managed its publication, save that after Doctor Phillips' retirement, and before my arrival, for some eighteen months my son, Rev. Walter C. Mason, and Miss Bond, with Rev. Thangkan Sangma and Ramsing Sangma as assistants, and with Rev. William Dring as manager, had published it. After that I again for nine years published it, having for the first four years Modhunath Momin as assistant and manager.

seemed to have a specially God-given aptness for certain work. One gifted for this work, after some years of teaching and drill, was sent to Calcutta to stay by the press and proof-read the double language book, but when barely fifty miles from Tura on his way he died of cholera.

An example of such God-supplied gifts was a boy twelve or fourteen years of age who could draw well whatever he saw. I took him to Tura for copying work for Bengali character periodical and books. Although his abilities in general were limited, he was a boon for that work. When not busy he would draw a bird, a goat, or what he would. One day he sketched so perfectly the back of Doctor Phillips walking by, that no one familiar with him could mistake the person intended.

What blessings are often found in such gifts; but even with such help, proof-reading is rather a tedious but very vital part of the work in putting Scripture into a new language under such conditions.

Summary of Old Testament Publications

Thus as finally revised and Romanized, Genesis came from the press in 1917, 1,000 copies separately bound and 2,500 copies set aside for an Old Testament volume. The last edition with notes had been 5,000 copies in 1903. Exodus was also revised again, and printed in 1917, 500 copies separately and 2,500 for an Old Testament volume. Leviticus was revised and printed, 1917; Numbers, with Deuteronomy now revised, was published, the two coming from the press in 1918, as also the new translations of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth in quantities as of former books.

All other books of the Old Testament were thus trans-

lated by Miss Bond, Modhunath, and myself, save that Rangam Momin and some others had made some first drafts and that Doctor Phillips, having regained some strength in America, had translated Psalms and Isaiah and sent them to us for revision. The translation of these two books, made in America without native helpers, appeared to me remarkably well done. This was his last translating. He failed slowly and was translated to his heavenly home in April, 1921, long before his work on Isaiah had reached us.

The others of the Old Testament books were translated and came from the press as follows: Psalms, 1919; 1 and 2 Kings, 1920; the two books each of Samuel and Chronicles, also Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Job, in 1921.

Up to this point all were bound up as Volume I of the Old Testament, making 1,017 pages. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon first came from the press in 1923. Finally, the other seventeen books came from the press in 1924, in Volume II of the Old Testament, which included Psalms to Malachi.

Miss Bond who had been absent from Tura helping at Sadiya for over a year, began to fail in health, and left Tura in May of 1923; she went to her eternal home in January, 1924, having helped in the translation of all of the Old Testament.

Rev. Thangkan had died early in 1924. Since then Modhunath Momin has changed worlds. And as we reach the close of the story of *How the Bible Came Into the Garo Language,* but one or two who shared in any way in the work are still this side of the crossing.

In March, 1924, we left Tura for another furlough, stopping in Calcutta for further work on the printing

and proof-reading. Then that we might be nearer the presses in both Calcutta and Madras, and have the advantages of a cooler and more healthful climate, we went with our daughter Eleanor of Madras to Kodikanal where we worked at the proof-reading until all was printed. Then with the completed volume bound and in hand we sailed in June, reaching the United States in August of that year.

CHAPTER IX

A RETROSPECT

In this work Mrs. Mason's continued interest and helpfulness were ever manifest, without which the work could never have been done. Allow me to quote some sentences which I find written by her in a private letter to a personal friend.

Mrs. Mason's Views

She wrote:

Having reduced the language to writing, the whole Bible was to be written by hand with pen, much at first with strange and foreign characters. Upon returning from furlough the last time in 1915, although my husband had to take charge of the Middle English School here and of the building and repair work, we at once set to work to revise Genesis and got to printing as soon as we could. From that the work has gone steadily forward, book after book, all the time all kinds of work going on, from writing the first draft, reading first proof of one set, second of another, and third of another, making references, editing, correcting, typing—oh, when I look ahead from the first reading of the proof of Genesis it seems a very long way to the end of Malachi! How long, only those know who have done similar work. Many a day not more than one verse translated. While the Hebrew must be the guide, we used every available translation in English, all we could of Indian languages, sometimes referring to German, French, or Swedish in the effort to get the real meaning.

It would weary you to tell of the long list of interruptions from visitors, servants, Government officers.

Very many books on Natural History must be consulted to know

about birds, animals, stones. There is no one at any of the presses who print for us who knows the language, and aside from this the typemen failing to carry out corrections sometimes leave two errors instead of correcting one!

As we look back over these years our hearts are filled with deep gratitude for health to carry on and for the privilege of doing this work which no one else could do. But to think back along all the way we have come, we realize we could not do it again unless youth were renewed. The piles and piles and piles of MSS., the stacks and stacks and stacks of proof accumulated make my flesh ache and my nerves tingle as I think of all the weariness they represent. But that side is soon forgotten in the joy of seeing the Garos with a complete Bible in their own language. What it means to them who read for the first time of God's wonders, is not easily comprehended by us who have had it from infancy.

CHAPTER X

SOME GRATIFYING FRUITS

From annual statistical reports, I see that from the beginning 20,909 have been baptized in our twenty-one mother churches, and there are now 260 branches and 207 meeting-houses and a present church-membership of 12,308, and of Christian children and other attendants at services, 5,238. Every mother church has during the year had additions, and the average annual addition for the past few years is over 50 per church. Besides these there have grown up many churches in Kamrup, Goalpara, Mymensing, and adjoining territory, besides a few in each other field of the province. The Garos are not averse to moving to foreign locations, and there is not a mission station that has not received help from Garo assistants. Several ordained Garo pastors are found in other parts of the province. The annual association of the Garo Hills is usually well attended, even though for days many have to lug provisions and other necessities for the journey.

It is gratifying to learn that our Scriptures are still bought and read with seeming appreciation and that united work for souls is continued at these associations. Under date of March 15, 1928, Secretary Young, of the British and Foreign Bible Society, wrote to me saying:

I was able last month to share in the very interesting meetings of the Garo Christian Association held at Rajasimla.[1] Being fairly

[1] The place where the first missionary visit was made and the first Garo Christian church organized in 1867.

familiar with the history of Christian work since its inception, I could picture you and others years ago making tedious journeys to similar meetings. The meetings were an inspiration to one like myself who has general experience of the small churches in Bengal.

"The president of the association did his work in very creditable style, and the businesslike brevity of those who took part in the meetings would set a good example to longwinded orators in Bengal. On the Sunday there were 3,500 Garos at the morning service, a very large proportion of whom had stayed for the communion service. The friends made me a present of a spear and a sword, and there were some dramatic moments when with these weapons in one hand and the Bible in the other Brother Ramsing explained how great the change since the days when the sword and the spear were the weapons of offense and defense. I greatly valued an experience which seemed to bring me once again into touch with you who for fifty years nurtured a growing Christian community. At my annual meeting last week, I described my visit and I have been told that it came as a revelation to several of my hearers who had no idea of the wonderful victories of the gospel in Assam.

Under date of October 21, 1929, he further writes:

We have had a busy and prosperous year, and one feature of it has been the steadily increasing orders which come from the American Baptist Mission Stations in Assam. The Scriptures in the tribal languages seem to be going well, and we are having to reprint them from time to time. At the present moment a reprint of Garo Psalms, Numbers, and Deuteronomy is going through the press. I rejoice to find that you did your work so well that no one is anxious to alter it except in minor points, and this is a very real tribute to the accuracy of your translation.

Later reports come to me of other fruits of Bible truths, in that some of the workers decline offers from the Government of larger salaries and higher positions even with the privilege of preaching the gospel, because serving

Christ is their first work. Rev. Thangkan now in Glory, when offered a salary of five times his allowance as a Mission worker, thought if serving the Government he might be required to visit some section of the country while the Holy Spirit might be leading to another region, so he replied, " I cannot serve two masters, and choose to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

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How came the Bible into the
Garo language?